

A SPECIAL GESTURE FROM STOKES & CO:

New Zealand's Tim Southee, who is playing his final Test at the Seddon Park, received a guard of honour from England players yesterday. The visiting side, led by Ben Stokes, showed this heartfelt gesture as the retiring pacer walked out to bat on the opening day of the third Test in Hamilton. Southee, accompanied by his daughter and teammates, took to the field at the start of the play, marking an emotional moment in a career spanning 107 Tests. The 36-year-old then quickfired a 10-ball-23, helping the Black Caps breach the 300-run mark and finish the day at 315-9.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK



Liton's form in focus as Tigers begin final assignment of 2024

SPORTS REPORTER

Stand in skipper Liton Das's form will be in focus as Bangladesh begin their final international assignment of the year – a three-match T20I series against the West Indies – with the series opener taking place at the Arnos Vale Ground in Kingstown, St Vincent on Monday.

The wicketkeeper-batter has had a horrid time in both white-ball formats this year, averaging just 1.20 in five ODIs and 18.25 in 17 T20Is outings.

With the added responsibility of leadership thrust upon him in the absence of regular skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto, it will be interesting to see whether the experienced cricketer can inspire both himself and the team during the T20I series after the 3-0 drubbing they received in the preceding ODI series in St Kitts.

Liton, who has led the Tigers in this format once before against New Zealand in Auckland in 2021, could not have asked for a better venue to change his fortune as it was this very ground where he scored his lone half-century in white ball cricket this year, an unbeaten 54 against Afghanistan during a T20 World Cup match.

Just like Liton, Bangladesh will also be looking for a change of fortunes in T20Is against West Indies, having lost their previous five meetings against the Caribbean side with their last win coming in 2018, when the Tiger won by 36 runs in the second match of a three-match series they lost 2-1.

To end this cycle of disappointment, Bangladesh would be hoping that Soumya Sarkar, who hit a run-a-ball 73 in the third ODI against West Indies,



will replicate his recent good performances in the format.

The southpaw was named the player-of-the-tournament in the recently-concluded Global Super League held in Guyana after finishing as the highest scorer with 188 runs for champions Rangpur Riders.

"I came here [Caribbean] few days earlier. I played in the GSL, it was a good opportunity for me, I had a good tournament," Soumya said ahead of the series-opener.

"It's not about which is the big team and which is the small team. It's about which team plays better for 40 overs on the field. If we can do well in all three departments, batting, bowling and fielding, we believe that we can easily beat them.

"They are a good team in T20s. But rather than focusing on that, we need to focus on giving our best. That's how we can win the match," he said, adding that he hoped the bowlers will bounce back from their poor showing in the ODI series.

Meanwhile, West Indies have had an up and down year in T20Is, winning 14 of 24 games and failing to qualify for the knockout stage of the T20 World Cup they jointly hosted with the USA.

The hosts will get the services of their T20 stars like Rovman Powell, Brandon King, Johnson Charles and Nicholas Pooran in the series and will hope to carry the winning momentum from the 50-over series into the shortest format.

The match is scheduled to start at 06:00 am Bangladesh time and will be telecast live on T Sports.

BCB seeks ICC clarification over Shakib's bowling suspension

SPORTS REPORTER

A Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official yesterday said they have sought clarification from the International Cricket Council (ICC) to understand whether the bowling suspension imposed on Shakib Al Hasan by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) will also be applicable in international cricket.

"We have sought clarification from the ICC. When they inform us, we can talk about how we will go about this matter. The BCB will clarify its position regarding him soon," BCB's cricket operations in-charge Shahrar Nafees told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We got the mail yesterday [Friday]. We will assess it and then decide what to do," he added.

Earlier on Friday, Shakib was slapped with a suspension by the ECB after his bowling action during a County Championship match for Surrey in September was found to be illegal at independent testing at Loughborough University earlier this month. This suspension, which officially began on December 10, would not allow Shakib to bowl in any competition organised by the ECB.

However, according to section 11.3 of ICC Regulations for the Review of Bowlers Reported with Suspected Illegal Bowling Actions, ICC and other cricket boards can also enforce this suspension.

Shakib, who has not played international cricket for Bangladesh since the Test series against India in September-October, is currently in Sri Lanka, taking part in the Lanka T10 for Galle Marvels.

Diabate 'inspires' Mohammedan, frustrates Abahani again

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club's dependency on their long serving striker Souleymane Diabate continues as they secured a 1-0 victory over archrivals Abahani in a crucial Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) fixture in Cumilla yesterday.

The 33-year-old Malian, who had scored the decisive goal against holders Bashundhara Kings in the previous match, rose high to nod home a well-judged cross from Minhajur Abedin from close range in first-half stoppage time.

Ahead of this much-anticipated clash, Mohammedan coach Alfaz Ahmed's decision to rest six players – including Diabate, adjudged player of the match, and Minhajur – during Tuesday's Federation Cup encounter against Rahmatganj MFS eventually paid off, as the fresh players played vital roles in the closely contested affair.

Since making his debut for the Black and Whites in 2019, Diabate has played 11 league matches against Abahani, scoring eight goals in seven of those matches, in which Mohammedan won one, drew four, and lost two. Diabate also frustrated Abahani by scoring four goals in last year's Federation Cup final, where Mohammedan clinched the trophy with a 4-2 victory in tiebreakers.

"There is no question about Diabate's goal-scoring ability, and he is still our main player, who regularly inspires others on the field," said Alfaz.

"He keeps lighting us up with his performances. Compared to last season, he has been performing well from the start of this season, and we are looking forward to seeing more from him in the coming days."

Alfaz expressed satisfaction after securing three points but

MATCH	RESULT	SCORERS
Mohammedan vs Abahani	1 - 0	Diabate (45+2)
Kings vs Rahmatganj	4 - 1	Fernandes (10), Ferreira (54+1), Rana (53), Tapu (76); Jibon (12)
Wanderers vs Police	0 - 4	Al Amin (36, 42), Dipok (79), Kirmane (84)



acknowledged there is still a long way to go as Mohammedan aim for the elusive professional league title this season.

"We have already crossed two big hurdles, and we need to stay focused in the remaining matches to avoid dropping points," said Alfaz, adding that Abahani, despite missing their foreign players, were still strong enough to challenge Mohammedan.

At Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium, Mohammedan dominated the opening half, ending up with a deserving lead. Abahani, however, responded strongly after the interval, creating several chances – most notably, Mohammad Ibrahim's powerful shot came off the post

early in the second half before Arman Faisal Akash narrowly missed the target late in the stoppage time.

"I am disappointed with the result because we deserved at least one point," said Abahani head coach Maruful Haque, adding that they never felt the absence of foreign players in terms of ball possession and creating chances against Mohammedan.

With three consecutive victories, Mohammedan now top the table with nine points, two ahead of second-placed Brothers Union and three clear of the joint third-placed teams Abahani, Bashundhara Kings, and Rahmatganj MFS.

MANCHESTER DERBY City crisis overshadows United's malaise

REUTERS, LONDON

It would have seemed inconceivable at the start of the Premier League season that by the time the Manchester derby rolled around it would be Pep Guardiola's City enduring a crisis so serious it has distracted attention from United's malaise.

That has really taken some doing. After all, United sacked manager Erik ten Hag in October, parted ways with sporting director Dan Ashworth this week after just five months and sit 13th in the table under new manager Ruben Amorim.

United's 3-2 home defeat by Nottingham Forest last weekend underlined the size of the task Amorim faces at Old Trafford.

Yet it is City's meltdown which is the main talking point ahead of Sunday's clash at The Etihad Stadium.

Guardiola's side have won once in their last 10 matches in all competitions, sit fourth in the Premier League, eight points behind leaders Liverpool, and are in danger of a

humiliating exit from the Champions League.

Beset with injuries to key players and drained of confidence, City's 2-0 defeat by Juventus on Wednesday had some pundits declaring the end of Guardiola's golden era.

All things are relative though. Since United's last Premier League title in 2013, City have won it seven times, six under Guardiola including the last four.

City still possess a squad full of serial winners and Guardiola, having signed a two-year contract extension, is hardly likely to walk away or be shown the door any time soon.

The Spaniard is not immune to criticism though and City fans will demand a return to business as usual, starting with the visit of United on Sunday.

"Of course, I question myself in the good moments and the bad moments. I was stable in the good moments and I'm stable in the bad moments," Guardiola said after defeat in Turin left his side in 22nd place in the 36-team Champions League group.



Shanto shines on return

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto marks a brilliant comeback from injury, smashing 80 off 54 deliveries for Rajshahi Division in their National Cricket League (NCL) T20 fixture against Barishal Division at Sylhet Outer Stadium yesterday. Despite the valiant effort of Shanto after over a month-long layoff from injury, sustained during last month's Afghanistan ODI series in Sharjah, Rajshahi lost by five wickets in a high-scoring thriller. Meanwhile, in other third-round matches, Rangpur Division, Dhaka Metro, and Chattogram Division secured victories in their respective encounters against Sylhet Division, Khulna Division, and Dhaka Division.

PHOTO: NCL



Way Way Shai Marma captivates the audience during the 5th National Age-Group Gymnastics Championship, sponsored by Sheltech Group, at the National Sports Council (NSC) gymnasium in Dhaka yesterday. Way, who competed in six events in the 13-15-year-old category for Quantum Cosmo School and College, finished first in parallel bars, high bar, and floor exercise, while securing runner-up positions in the rings and vault events. Quantum Cosmo, established in Bandarban with the aim of accomodating under-privileged children, claimed an overwhelming 70 out of 80 medals across six age-group categories -- ranging from seven to 15 -- while BKSP bagged the rest.

PHOTO: STAR